



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Grand Junction Field Office
2815 H Road
Grand Junction, Colorado 81506



IN REPLY REFER TO:

April 6, 2006

8300 (CO130)

Dear Reviewer:

The BLM has issued a final environmental assessment (EA) and Decision Record for implementation of the Bangs Canyon Management Plan (CO-130-2004-018-EA). Implementation decisions generally represent the BLM's final approval for a specific management action. Implementation decisions are subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) under 43 CFR 4.411.

Process for Appeals

Implementation decisions are not subject to protest under the planning regulations but are subject to various administrative remedies, primarily appeals to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) under 43 CFR 4.411. An appeal is an opportunity for a qualified party to obtain a review of a BLM decision by an independent board of Administrative judges within the Department of the Interior's Office of Hearings and Appeals. The IBLA determines whether the BLM followed applicable laws and regulations, adhered to established policies and procedures and considered relevant information in reaching an implementation decision.

If you want to appeal an implementation decision from this EA to the IBLA you must file a notice that you wish to appeal a decision (i.e., Notice of Appeal) to the Grand Junction Field Office of the BLM within 30 days of the public notification of the decision. The notice of appeal must include a serial number or other identification of the case (EA number CO-130-2004-018-EA) and may also include statement of the reasons for the appeal. If the Notice of Appeal does not include a statement of reasons you must file that statement with the IBLA within 30 days after the Notice of Appeal was filed.

The statement of reasons should be mailed to:

Interior Board of Land Appeals
Office of Hearings and Appeals
801 North Quincy Street
Arlington, VA 22203

Failure to file the statement of reasons within the time required will result in summary dismissal of the appeal.

Within 15 days after each document is filed, you must then serve a copy of the notice of appeal, the statement of reasons and any written arguments to:

Office of the Regional Solicitor
Rocky Mountain Region
U.S. Department of the Interior
755 Parfet Street, Suite 151
Lakewood, CO 80215

Service of the documents to the Solicitor must be accomplished through personal delivery, or by sending the document(s) by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested. Within 15 days of service of documents to the Solicitor you must provide proof of that service to the IBLA at the address above. Questions or requests for paper copies of the final Bangs Canyon implementation EA and/or Decision Record may be addressed to Jim Cooper at (970) 244-3047 or to Britta Laub at (970) 244-3031 or at Colorado_Bangs_Plan@blm.gov.

Sincerely,

Raul Morales
Field Manager, Acting

**DECISION RECORD
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

CO-130-2004-018-EA

Bangs Canyon Management Plan Implementation

**USDI Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction Field Office**

Mesa County, Colorado

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI): The EA, analyzing the environmental effects of the Proposed Action, has been reviewed. The Proposed Action, as modified and described in the Selected Alternative, results in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action.

DECISION: It is my decision to implement actions as described in the Selected Alternative in this Decision Record. The Revised Agency Proposed Action (RAPA), or Alternative 5, is the Selected Alternative. The RAPA was crafted after public comment consideration and is a mixture of selected actions from each alternative.

INTRODUCTION: This document describes my decision and rationale for implementation of the Bangs Canyon Management Plan. Under the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared to determine if the Proposed Action might cause significant impacts to the human environment. The EA was prepared to evaluate the impacts of full implementation of the Bangs Canyon Management Plan.

My decision and finding are based on the EA which evaluated the proposed action and alternatives for the Bangs Canyon plan and the goals and objectives stated in the Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP). It is my decision to implement the Revised Agency Proposed Action as described under Selected Alternative in this Decision Record.

BACKGROUND:

The Bangs Canyon Intensive Recreation Management Area is directly south of Grand Junction and is one of several recreation areas in Mesa County under the jurisdiction of the Grand Junction BLM. Other areas in the county managed by BLM include the 125,000 acre McInnis Canyons NCA which is managed for a variety of uses including Wilderness/hike/horse use (90,610 acres), mountain bike use (5,500 acres), river uses (9,900); scientific uses/wildlife viewing (10,015 acres), and motorized use (8,650 acres); the 72,000 acre North Fruita Desert which contains mountain bike only and hike/horse only areas in addition to over 250 miles of shared-use trails; the 11,200 acre Grand Junction OHV intensive use area which is open to cross country motorized travel; and four wilderness study areas totaling over 141,200 acres (a portion of the Sewemup WSA is located within Montrose County). The 20,400 acre Colorado National Monument, managed by the National Park Service, lies directly west of Bangs Canyon.

The 58,000 acre Bangs Canyon Intensive Recreation Management Area was designated by the 1987 Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP). Under the general management guidance of the RMP, the area was managed for dispersed motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities. However, lack of intensive management lead to resource impacts and some illegal use of the area. The urban interface zones to the south of Grand Junction saw the bulk of these issues. Public lands adjacent to Monument Road and Little Park Road saw weekend parties which left unsightly litter, trash and bonfires. Neighbors complained of the parties, resulting

noise, and litter. Dumping of garden clippings and household waste in the draws and unoccupied desert lands was common. Vehicular access into Bangs Canyon off of these roads was unrestricted and the resulting user created routes were unsightly and caused resource damage. The paving of Little Park Road in the mid-1990's greatly increased ease of access into Bangs Canyon and expanded the urban-interface issues into new areas of the Bangs Canyon management area.

The central core of Bangs Canyon had been identified through the RMP as a backcountry primitive area with opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation. The management actions in this decision are aimed at preserving these opportunities. The East Creek corridor along highway 141 just south of Whitewater saw dumping of refrigerators, construction materials, and other litter. Portions of this corridor were used by transients as a living/sleeping area. Other areas along the highway 141 corridor were used as access to hill climbs, visible from the Unaweep-Tabeguache State Scenic Byway.

An Ad Hoc group, sanctioned by the NW Resource Advisory Council, was formed in 1995 to address these issues through the development of a management plan. The Bangs Canyon Management Plan (BCMP) was completed in 1999 and directs BLM to take actions to properly develop the urban interface areas and preserve the core of the area for its backcountry primitive values. Many actions called for in the BCMP have been implemented.

Results of these actions include removal of the trash dumps and a decrease in dumping on public lands. Weekend drinking parties no longer occur off of Monument Road in Area 1 or off Little Park Road in Areas 2 and 3, however this problem still exists off of Little Park Road in Area 4. Much of Little Park Road was fenced which has prevented random access onto public lands. This has enhanced the visuals along the road and prevented impacts to the resource. The East Creek corridor was closed to overnight use which has greatly reduced the problems generated by a transient population. Portions of the highway 141 corridor have had barriers installed, reducing random access into the area. This has reduced opportunities for hill climbing and resource damage. Motorized access was restricted into Area 1 off of Monument Road. This action nearly eliminated parties, trash dumping and motorized proliferation of trails at this site. What once was a glass and tire junkyard became a popular local mountain biking and hiking area. Recreation trails and managed recreation opportunities in areas 1, 2, 3 and 4 are enhanced due to the management actions taken to date. The spider web of unauthorized motorized routes has been reduced. In the case of Area 1, proliferation of trails by hikers, bikers and trail runners remains a problem. The Billings Canyon Jeep trail has redirected rockcrawling/4X4 use to an appropriate area.

Some issues remain. The population of Grand Junction and surrounding communities is growing. Users of the area and other public lands in the region have indicated a need for more trails for both motorized and non-motorized uses. Bicycle freeriding/downhill riding has become popular and a demand for these trails is growing. Many of the narrow (18-24") trails are not designed for horses and conflicts between equestrians and bikers/hikers is occurring in Area 1. Commitments spelled out in the BCMP to the motorized community (ATV, motorcycle and 4X4) for close-to-home riding opportunities in Bangs Canyon remain unmet. Results of monitoring of the Tabeguache Trail in Area 1 have resulted in the recommendation to close this portion of the trail to motorized use. This recommendation will be implemented through this decision. Trailheads are at capacity on many weekends. Dog waste issues are causing health concerns. New, unauthorized social trails are being created from private property to public lands. Motorized access from Little Park Road to Highway 141 has not been secured. Allowable travel on many "designated" routes has not yet been defined. Many recreation trails do not meet sustainability requirements or lead to dead ends. Although issues remain, efforts to manage the area have improved the area and have created a community recreation resource.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE:

Summary

This decision was made after careful evaluation and analysis of the Revised Agency Proposed Action (RAPA/Alternative 5), the proposed action, alternatives, and consideration of all comments. The RAPA was crafted after public comment consideration and is a mixture of selected actions from each alternative. Actions common across all areas are listed followed by area specific actions.

Actions Common Across the entire BCMA or in more than One Area

1. OHV sound limit of 96 db using the SAE 20" [SAE J1287] test will be applied throughout the management area.
2. Fire pans and portable human waste disposal devices are required for all dispersed camp sites. Impacts from dispersed camping will be monitored. If monitoring indicates, BLM has the option of designating dispersed camping locations and limiting camping to the designated locations only.
3. In the future fees may be charged of recreation visitors commensurate with amenities provided in accordance with regulations and policies.
4. Two day use areas will be designated. Day use is defined as closed to occupancy from 10PM to 6AM every day. One day use area includes all of Areas 1, 2 and 4; all of Area 3 except the area east of the Tabeguache Trail beyond where the trail crosses the Rough Canyon drainage east of the falls; and the northwest portion of Area 5 that is north of the Tabeguache Trail along the slickrock to east of the falls. The other day use area is adjacent to East Creek and to the north boundary of private land (Alber) along Highway 141 in area 6 (see Night-time Closure Area on the Map 7). Exceptions may be granted on a case by case basis. Trailheads will be located within day use areas. Vehicles will be allowed to park overnight at these facilities. However, no occupancy will be allowed within the night time closure hours.
5. A monitoring plan will be developed and implemented. Appropriate monitoring protocols will be selected for each type of site. A permanent administrative record will be kept to document impacts and serve as information for future actions that may be needed to mitigate impacts or address changes in use. Partnerships will be encouraged and developed to monitor impacts to the area following the Billings Canyon/Grand Mesa Jeep Club model.
6. "No target shooting areas" have been redefined to include all devices that propel a projectile, including but not limited to, sling shots, paint ball, air guns, and bow and arrow. This does not apply to the lawful taking of game.
7. Travel in Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4 will be restricted to designated routes for all uses. This includes, but is not limited to hiking and horse use. Administrative routes in these areas are unavailable for use by the public.
8. Cross country hiking and equestrian use is allowed in Areas 5 and 6.
9. Continue efforts to acquire the two parcels along the Gunnison River that prohibit legal public access on the Magellan Loop Trail. Easements allowing public access across these parcels is an option should efforts to acquire these parcels fail. Once these parcels are under BLM management the trail will be assessed for adherence to the "Criteria for the Placement of Trails", modified to meet the criteria and be made available as a shared use trail (See Criteria for Placement of Trails, Appendix A of the EA).

10. In cooperation with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, a series of water developments may be constructed in remote locations of Area 5 and 6 to benefit big game (specifically, for bighorn sheep). No more than 12 locations will have these water developments. The benefits of water development include increased water sources for big game and other species, disbursement of the herds over a broader range, and water distribution over a larger area which allows wildlife to use other available forage.
11. The action includes the designation of administrative routes. These routes are set aside for use by permittees and BLM personnel for administrative use. Administrative routes are not open for use by the general public. The purposes for the routes, allowable users and seasons of each route will be identified in the appropriate permit/ROW.
12. Regulatory, informational, interpretive signage, and trail markers such as flex-post markers will be placed in appropriate locations to educate users on area regulations, travel management prescriptions, conditions of use, trail locations, seasonal information, resource condition, etc according to BLM and Colorado interagency sign standards. Barriers and gates will be used to direct use consistent with travel management prescriptions.
13. All newly constructed trails will conform to the "Criteria for the Placement of Trails". Some existing designated trails will require reroutes or major maintenance to be brought up to this standard. Existing designated routes will remain open until reroutes, replacements or reconstruction is completed.
14. The location of proposed trails as shown on the accompanying maps represent GPS (global positioning system) and GIS (geographic information system) data from preliminary trail design and layout work. Site-specific cultural, T&E species, and paleontological surveys will be conducted prior to surface disturbing activities. If resource conflicts are identified, minor relocation of the proposed actions may occur without additional analysis.
15. Priority will be given to actions where users/publics demonstrate stewardship and assist BLM in implementation and monitoring the area according to the monitoring plan.
16. Special Recreation Permit (SRP) applications will be considered pursuant to SRP policy and evaluated against user conflict, maintenance of trail condition/integrity, and ability to help meet BLM's resource and social objectives.
17. Within deer and elk critical winter range, no construction will occur from December 1 to May 1, and within bald eagle concentration areas, no construction will occur from December 1 to April 1. In the event of mild winter conditions modifications or a waiver of this restriction will be considered.
18. Work with Mesa County to provide a hike/bike crossing across Little Park Road to the Little Park trailhead to connect Area 4 trails with Area 1 and 2 trails. (Gunny Loop, etc).
19. Future actions will be considered through separate analysis. Future project analysis will consider impacts to the recreation resource and design of these projects will be consistent with the BCMP and other resource program objectives.
20. BLM will coordinate with CDOT on issues arising from random parking and user created pull-offs along Highway 141.

21. Seasonal closures will be instituted as needed on any component of the trail system to protect soils and wildlife during critical seasons. Seasonal wildlife closures will be coordinated with the DOW.

22. An implementation schedule will be developed. The plan will place priorities on actions that have funding and provide opportunities for community partnerships.

Area 1:

- A. The trails and route network follow those as described in Alternative 1. Types of trails will include beginner to expert for hiking, biking and trail running; freeride/downhill biking trails; and instructional/biking trails.
- B. The Tabeguache Trail, from Monument Road to Little Park Road, will be closed to motorized use. Unsustainable portions of the trail will be rerouted as necessary. The route will remain open to motorized access for administrative use and law enforcement only.
- C. Area 1 will be retained in BLM ownership to be managed in cooperation with the city of Grand Junction. Area 1 trailhead (Monument Road) will be developed including the installation of sanitation facilities (including a dog waste program) in cooperation with the city of Grand Junction and/or other willing partners.

Area 2:

- A. The trails and route network follow those as described in Alternative 1.
- B. Construct a connector hiking trail from the Ribbon Trailhead to Old Gordon trail in the Colorado National Monument.
- C. Additional loop hiking trails will be built between Ladder Canyon and Little Park Road.
- D. Designate loop hiking and biking trails on the slickrock north of Little Park Road. These trails will be served by the Kiln and Ribbon Trailheads.
- E. Construction of a hike/bike trail west of Little Park Road.
- F. Construct a loop hike trail that connects these points: Ribbon trail to Little Park Road, south of Little Park road to the Bangs Trailhead, and to the Kiln trailhead.
- G. Barricade existing closed routes west of Little Park Road to enforce the closures.

Area 3:

- A. The trails and route network follow those as described in Alternative 1 with the exception of two hiking only trails constructed on the rim/canyon bottom of Rough Canyon, omitting the SW trail which had been originally proposed.
- B. Horse use will be allowed only on the Mica Mine and Clarks Bench trails.

Area 4:

- A. The Little Park Trailhead will serve non-motorized activities only. Motorized public access will not be allowed beyond Little Park Trailhead. Motorized trails in the northern portion of area 4 have been rerouted or designated as non-motorized routes. There will be no linkage between the non-motorized routes and the motorized routes in area 4. Some motorized routes will be built in the southern portion of area 4.
- B. Trail development as shown on Map 7 (Recreation Trail System), including the closure of routes as shown on Map 5 (RAPA/Alternative 5) with the exception of Area 4, item E, below.

- C. The motorized trail system will be based on primary access from the existing Bangs Canyon Trailhead and will occur in the southern portion of Area 4. These include a system of looped shared-use trails for ATVs, mountain bicycles, motorcycles, equestrians and hikers.
- C. If future use levels warrant, construct a vault toilet at Little Park Trailhead and expand the trailhead.
- D. Closure of the Second Flats access off Little Park Road. This access point will no longer connect to the recreational trail system.
- E. Construct a connection from the Tabeguache Trail to the Gunny Loop and Ribbon Trails for hikers and mountain bikers.
- F. Design and construct loop hiking and equestrian trails in the area where trails were previously closed near Little Park road. The area has been defined, but specific loops not yet identified.
- G. Closure of the road leading east into Billings Canyon from the intersection (at east entrance) with the Billings Canyon Jeep trail.

Area 5:

- A. No equestrian/hiking trails will be constructed in the east end of area 5.
- B. Where the Tabeguache Trail splits into two alternate routes (two different levels of difficulty), travel will be allowed within the designated corridor, or "island" between the two trails (5-B).
- D. Two ATV routes will be constructed in the northern portion of area 5 north of the Windmill Road. This includes construction of an ATV trail from Hells Hole to connect to an existing route on the Magellan Loop and an ATV trail connecting the existing Horse Mesa routes to the existing road leading to Billings Canyon.
- E. Continue to manage the backcountry primitive area south of Windmill Road for these values. Some existing public routes will be closed and rehabilitated. Administrative access will be maintained in order to maintain range improvements, guzzlers, etc.
- F. Close Tabeguache at reroute location (see Map 7, reroute location marked as "Closed east of this point") to motorized and mechanized uses and reroute the Tabeguache through Area 6 to Highway 141. Continue to allow foot, horse, and administrative use on Old Tabeguache east to Highway 141.

Area 6:

NOTE: Trailhead names have been changed to reduce confusion. The locations remain the same as described in Alternative 2. The Unawep trailhead was renamed as the Whitewater trailhead. The East Creek trailhead remains the East Creek trailhead. The Northeast Creek trailhead was renamed the Unawep trailhead. The East Creek trailhead would be expanded to act as the primary motorized trailhead and staging area.

- A. The existing routes west of the Tabeguache Trail will be designated as administrative routes or will be closed.
- B. The Tabeguache Trail connection to Highway 141 will occur as described in the Proposed Action. This will include the development/construction of a challenging 4 wheel drive route connecting the Tabeguache trail to the Northeast Creek Road (6-15 on Map 7). A short connector to Snyder Flats Road will be made from the North East Creek Trail (6-14). Another

connector from Snyder Flats Road to the North East Creek Road (6-13) will be constructed, thus connecting to Highway 141.

The reroute from Highway 141 to the Tabeguache and on to Little Park Road will be a two track primitive road available to all users (shared use). The Tabeguache reroute will provide a route from Highway 141 to Little Park Road that travels over more variety of terrain and a more challenging route than the existing alignment provides. Completion of the reroute will provide a through access for motorized users from Little Park Road to Hwy 141, which the current alignment does not.

C. A narrow trail (18-24" wide) system designed for motorcycles and mountain bikes will be constructed in the southern portion of Area 6, see Map 7.

D. The existing two-track route in the north eastern portion of Area 6 (East Creek Trail) will be extended to connect with the North East Creek Access Road (6-12 on Map 7) and will be available to all uses (shared-use).

E. All motorized access off of Highway 141 south of the East Creek Trailhead (6-2, 6-3, 6-4, 6-5 on Map 7) will be closed to motorized vehicles with the exception of Snyder Flats Road, Northeast Creek Road, and Whitewater, East Creek and UnawEEP Trailheads. One location for access will be designated and delineated for use by rock climbers.

G. A day use trailhead will be constructed at a location next to the North East Creek Access road (UnawEEP Trailhead) at the time the trail system is constructed. This facility is a secondary trailhead for access to the Area 6 trails. The Whitewater and UnawEEP trailheads will be developed as secondary trailheads, accommodating fewer vehicles. The trailheads will be developed and may include sanitation facilities if use dictates.

H. Construct a hiking only trail in East Creek (6-6). The trail will avoid the riparian zone.

The following is a summary of the mileages and acreages affected by the full implementation of the 1999 BCMP. The decision defines allowable uses for specific routes and calls for new trail systems. Through this decision, the mileage of routes available to the public is reduced. Prior to 1999 (approval of the BCMP), 251 miles were available to the public. Presently, 216 miles of routes are available to the public. With the implementation of this decision, 187 miles will be available to the public. Although fewer miles will be available, the recreation experience will be of a higher quality and resource protection will be enhanced.

ALTERNATIVE 5-SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

	Area 1 Miles	Area 2 Miles	Area 3 Miles	Area 4 Miles	Area 5 Miles	Area 6 Miles	TOTAL MILEAGE
Closed	9	8	0	10	7	11	45
Admin	0	1	0	1	23	56	81
Existing	15	9	9	13	24	20	90
New	12	6	4	20	6	49	97
Open public routes	27	15	13	33	30	69	187

Bangs Canyon Statistics

	Pre 1999 BCMP		Present (2006)		Full Implementation	
	MILES	ACRES	MILES	ACRES	MILES	ACRES
Managed for primitive character		12,252		12,252		34,044
Managed for trail opportunities	251		216		187	

RATIONALE:

BLM thanks all of the individuals and groups who have participated in the original 1999 plan and in the formulation of this EA. Comments received were used in crafting the final alternative. The goal of this EA is to fully implement the Bangs Canyon Management Plan. Where the BCMP is silent or subsequent law, regulation or policy has given guidance, the EA follows the relevant document. In some cases where the BCMP is silent or defers decisions, the 1987 RMP is the guiding document.

BLM received over 3,000 comments. Of these, approximately 300 were substantive. Feedback from the residents of Little Park Road led us to relocate the motorized trail system and access to this system. Communications from the ATV community asked for ATV specific trails. We have included a series of ATV specific trails in area 4 and 5. Enthusiasts requested additional single track opportunities for bicycles and motorcycles. These will be developed as a shared use system in area 6. A large number of people urged us to manage for backcountry values. A 34,000 acre parcel in area 5 and 6 has been identified to meet this objective. In several locations routes have been closed or relocated to reduce impacts to our neighbors. In the development of the final decision, BLM has balanced resource protection with recreation demand. BLM took into account the wide variety of values and points of view expressed by our various publics.

The BLM has heard from many interested publics during the Bangs Canyon public meetings, field trips and through the EA comment period. The BLM considered this input in the development of the final decision. This decision represents a balanced approach in the full implementation of the BCMP. BLM is committed to addressing unmanaged recreation activities in the region. Full implementation of the BCMP will provide for managed trail based recreation opportunities and help BLM achieve its commitment. Full implementation will require assistance from the public. Implementation priority will be given to projects where users demonstrate stewardship and partner in the implementation of actions and monitoring of the area.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING:

All newly constructed routes will be designed and constructed in compliance with the Criteria for The Placement of Trails. Existing routes that are included in the recreational trail system will be upgraded or realigned to comply with this criteria. All closed routes will be rehabilitated in accordance with best management practices.

Wildlife habitat issues will be monitored with the cooperation of the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Should DOW find that the actions are not meeting our joint goals, additional actions to meet these goals will be analyzed under separate analysis.

A monitoring plan will be developed. Monitoring techniques to be employed include but are not limited to documented patrols, use number collection, visitor surveys, traffic counter information,

and photo monitoring. The purpose of the plan is to document user conflict, resource conditions, infrastructure and trail conditions, experiences, spread/presence of weeds, compliance with conditions of use, and demand for trail opportunities. The monitoring plan will be updated as decisions are implemented to ensure site specific monitoring needs are met. Partners and the user public will be encouraged to participate in the monitoring process.

NAME OF PREPARERS:

Jim Cooper and Grand Junction BLM Recreation Team

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:

Jane Peterson

DATE: April 5, 2006

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Raul Morales
Field Manager, Acting
Grand Junction Field Office

April 5, 2006
Date